



THE NAVAJO NATION

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT & VICE PRESIDENT

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

AUG. 3, 2007

CONTACT: GEORGE HARDEEN

COMMUNICATIONS DIRECTOR

OFFICE – 928-871-7917

CELL – 928-309-8532

pressoffice@opvp.org

Navajo President Joe Shirley, Jr., Vice President Ben Shelly, First Lady Vikki Shirley join students at Youth Conference

TSAILE, Ariz. – Navajo Nation President Joe Shirley, Jr., Vice President Ben Shelly, and First Lady Vikki Shirley joined Miss Navajo Nation Jocelyn Billy here on Sunday to urge 135 students to stay in school and do their best.

Family and *ke'* are part of this foundation called personal success."

The occasion was the 2007 Youth Empowerment Conference at Diné College, sponsored by the Office of Miss Navajo Nation. Its mission was to empower youth through presentations that focused on tradition, culture, education, the environment and economy, and health. The event coincided with President Shirley's annual Back-to-School Youth Day.

"To the youth, stay in school," Miss Billy told students. "Parents and grandparents, support your children. Don't let them miss school. Keep them away from drugs and remind them of the dangers. Keep them in sports, and support them."

Approximately 300 students and their parents came to the Dine College auditorium to hear Rulon Gardner, an Olympic Gold Medal wrestler. At the 2000 Olympic Games in Sydney, Australia, Mr. Gardner, a determined Wyoming farm boy, defeated the greatest wrestler in Olympic history, Alexander Karelin of Russia.

"I struggled in grade school, being criticized all the time by my classmates for being the big guy," Mr. Gardner said. "I graduated from high school with a 5th grade reading level. Yet I found success in wrestling and in books, which allowed me to obtain a scholarship and



Navajo Nation First Lady Vikki Shirley, Vice President Ben Shelly, and President Joe Shirley, Jr., gave away school backpacks full of school supplies to students ranging from elementary through high school at the 2007 Youth Empowerment Conference sponsored by the Office of the President and Vice President and the Office of Miss Navajo Nation at Diné College in Tsale.

"It does well for the spirit, it does good for the heart," the President said about the value of education. "We need to move our children in the right direction. Education is the key to the success of any individual. Our parents need to continue teaching our children our sacred language and prayers. Only through our grandparents and parents, can our young ones truly be inspired to make a difference.

pursue a college degree. Education has instilled within me the confidence and drive that took me to the center of the sports world.”

Students were able to ask President Shirley and Vice President Shelly questions about their duties and responsibilities as the leaders of the largest Indian Nation in the United States.

The President said he aspired to become President in order to help those Navajo families without running water or electricity, students who deserve the best education possible, and veterans who struggle everyday when they were the ones on the front line fighting for our freedom.

Vice President Shelly said that more of the Navajo people need to become involved in the political process, and that he believes the Navajo Nation can move ahead only if Navajos worked together.

The Office of the President and Vice President presented the students with back-to-school supplies such as backpacks, paper, pens/pencils, and art supplies to help start them out, and to help parents.

Mrs. Shirley told the students she was pleased so many came out to the conference.

“The President and I work on your behalf, so that you can have a better future,” she told them. “We want you to make good choices in life and to grow up to be successful Navajo men and women. We also need your help by staying in school, and staying away from drugs and alcohol. As a MADD representative for the Navajo Nation, my staff and I work together to teach young kids on dangers of underage drinking and riding with drunk drivers.”

The First Lady recognized a student from Red Mesa – Chantelle White – who is a high school senior who serves as a youth leader of the “Protecting You-Protecting Me” program.

“Chantelle provided PY/PM education, prevention and safety techniques to many elementary students at Red Mesa, and it’s not easy being a youth leader, but



Miss Navajo Nation Jocelyn Billy

Chantelle has done it,” Mrs. Shirley said. “President Shirley and I appreciate all you do to help us send the message. The more we promote this great program on Navajo, the more young minds we can influence in the right direction.”

Among the contributors to the event this year was the Navajo Engineering and Construction Authority, the Navajo Department of Education, the Navajo Tax Commission, the Navajo Division of Social Services, the Navajo-Hopi Land Commission, the Navajo Division of Economic Development, the Navajo Division of Public Safety, and the Navajo Environmental Agency.

###